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HENRY MORSE STEPHENS

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TO ALBERT M. BENDER

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Voices are crying from the dust of Tyre,
From Karnak and the stones of Babylon—
We raised our pillars upon Self-Desire,
And perished from the large gaze of the sun.

Edwin Markham.

THE ODE

I

BE YE lift up, O gates of sea and land,
 Before the host that comes,
 Not, as of old, with roar of hurrying drums,
 And blaze of steel, and voice of war's command!
 Legions of peace are at thy borders now,
 O California, and ranks whose eyes
 Behold the deathless star upon thy brow

And know it leads to love.

Wherefore, give thou thy banners to the skies,
 And let the clarions of thy conquest sound!

For thine is holy ground,

And from thy heavens above
 Falls tenderly a rain of life, not death.

Thy sons have found

Again the rivers of that Paradise
 And valleys where the fig and olive grow,

Wherefrom, one saith,

Man journeyed forth in tears, and long ago.

Be ye lift up, O gates of many halls,

That house, sublime,

The trophies and the nobler spoils of Time!

From where the Orient in friendship calls

Across her ocean-roads,—

From Africa's abodes,—

From seas whose purple bore the keels of Tyre,—

From islands west and north,—

From lands that see the white Andean walls,—

From those frontiers of thunder and of fire
That compass Europe now, hath man sent forth
The fruitage of his labor and his art.

Behold the greatness of his mind and heart

Who so can strive

And, though the earthquake rive,
And War, with mailed hands at the race's throat,
Confirm the terrors that the prophets wrote
And all the stars have seen since Christ was born,
Can so bear witness to the soul within!

Yea! from Earth's mire of ignorance and sin

He marches with the morn,

And lays a new commandment on the sea,

Bidding it set the continents apart,

And of the trackless heavens is he free.

Yet those are but the lesser of his dreams,

When the white vision of the Future gleams,

And Music in his heart

Makes for a while the seraph he shall be;

For he would sway the sun's effulgent beams,

Vassal to that diviner sun, his brain,

And set afar the years of Death,

And with exultant breath

Cry victory on matter and on pain.

Lo! in what sorrow and mysterious mirth

Do we draw up against the Night our plan!

O toil of ants, beholding the great Earth!

O Titans' work, seeing how small is man!

II

Audacious age of the affirming word,
The useful doubt, the kindly sceptic gaze,
Greeting! for man too long has heard
The moans of war, too long beheld the blaze
Of cities on the skies
Or mirrored in the flood,
And Horror brooding with her moonlike eyes
O'er nations at debaucheries of blood.

Let now the veil be drawn
That hides from man thine inner loveliness,
While the young eagles of thy sciences
Soar from their pinnacles against the dawn!
For thou hast shown him how the years transmute
The dim surmisings of the larval brute,
And hast in mercy laid
A burden on his weakness and his wings—
This moth for whom the ranging stars were made,
This groping lord of things,
Come forth from night unknown to ends unseen,
With hint of what the constellations mean.

O man and his Adventure! From the slime
Of old abysses and the hateful hiss
Of dragons, hath he journeyed forth to this,
Whose soul strikes light through Time.
What seed of what Design was in that soul
And what its destined goal,
That he, once halt and blind,

Hath won the peaks above the brutish years,
And in the astounding crucibles of mind
Seeketh the mighty answer to his tears?
O patient toiler in the silent Night!
Thy triumphs stand about us, balm and book,
Complexities of steel and engines bright,
 The wings that serve our speed,
 And, whatso way one look,
A myriad shapes of human joy or need.
Here, too, the wonders of thy harvest shine,
 The corn, the fruit, the wine—
 The bounties great and fair
 That thou, with loving care,
Hast fostered on a thousand hills and plains,
 Trapping the distant rains,
 And on the wilderness
Leading new rills to compensate and bless.
And here the silent seraphim of Art
Gaze out august above the human streams.
O beauty making lonelier the heart,
And sending forth the soul on deathless dreams!

III

So have we striven and wrought, that one time were
The bestial folk of midden and of cave,
And now with lens and alchemy do test
The wandering heavens and Earth their wanderer.
 With toil of tireless hands,

How high we build, this side the awaiting grave,
Scorning awhile its answer and its rest.
Yet, can it be we build upon the sands?
Man's eye turns manward from the mote and star,
And sees past greatness given to the tomb,
Nor knows what destined doom
Waits, vigilant, where the Destructions are.
Lo! as a mist that melts before the day
The columns and the courts have passed away.
Advancing Time, look back
To where in mist the broken pillars fade,
The ghostly milestones of thy barren track!
Who took the blade have perished by the blade,
For thine the years when the old empires passed,
With wail of trumpets from a gulf of blood,
The annihilating flood
Wherein the countenance of Doom was glassed.
So sank they, one by one,
Who had gone forth in mail beneath the sun,
And, in their greed or lust,
Dragged lesser nations at the chariot wheels.
And now the old betrayal of the dust
Hath found them, striking from the anointed brow
The crown, and sinking all the intrepid keels.
The desert holds the oppressor and oppressed;
The winds alone are great in Carthage now;
The lizard and the lichen have the rest. . . .

What flaw in their foundations, and what ill
Upon their armored lords,
That ever down the years
The Worm that feeds on nations had its fill?
Not all the sentried ramparts and the spears,
Nor yet the trident and the walling swords
Could stem its might.

The thousand high-built Babylons of light
May mock the stars no longer, nor their kings
Be more than ashes where the desert finds
Echoes of doom and conquest on its winds,
But their names nevermore.

What flaw in their foundations, and what ill
Upon the hearts they bore,
That now the jackal litters on the hill
That once was Pharaoh's throne?
The question holds one answer and but one,
Between the rising and the setting sun:
They are the realms that built on self alone!

And we till now have built as even they!
And dimly and in few the vision stands
Of that new City built not on the sands;
And distant still the sunlight of that Day.
For walked the Babylonian again
Within our streets, once more should he behold
The immeasurable Care,
That ancient curse of poverty and gold,—

The selfsame twins of luxury and pain,—
The olden madness of division where
The poor beg work, and beg for it in vain,
And children slave, and stones are given for bread,
While Mammon lolls on cushions of his fat,
Whose glut not all the toil of men can sate.

Amid the tumult and the hate,
None hears the distant menace of the tread
Of One whose hands hold darkness and the dust,—

Whose reign is soon or late,—
Whose hunger with the monarch's pomp is fed,—
Who giveth kingdoms to the moth and rust,
Above whose glories, fleeting as a breath,
"Lo! I am come!" the Desolation saith.

IV

Behold! except Love build the House of Man,
In vain we labor and in vain we guard!

In vain shall Learning scan
That heaven where the hostile suns contend
Or inward skies of atoms many-starred,
If love of man for man be not the end.

And idly Reason strives,
If nevermore we find
The graver glory that escapes our lives.
Oh! for that hour when all see clear at last,
Who now go blind,
The horror and the brutality of the Past!

Oh! for some high-noon of the spirit, when
The Radiance be given unto men
That was the star of heroes and the Grail
For which the fearless saints of science died!
Oh! for the Light to see in every face
A mother's love, or father's tender care,
Or brother's faithfulness, or sister's grace!
What night of self and pride
Is on us, that we see not in each one
The lover long-denied,—
The dearest to us each beneath the sun?
The selfsame need is there
For hope and trust, for love and happiness;
But still amid the press,
Blinded, we pass beside
The stranger, and he fares a stranger still,
Nor see we there the brother or the sire;
And poor men hunger on the wasteful street,
And children toil and tire,
And girls go downward to the Social Ill,
And life's design of madness lies complete,
That Greed and Luxury may have their fill!
O dark and cruel State,
Whose towers are altars unto self alone,—
Whose streets with tears are wet,
And half thy councils given unto hate!
Shall Time not hurl thy temples stone from stone.
And o'er the ruin set

A fairer city than the years have known?
Out of thy darkness do we find us dreams,
 And on the future gleams
The vision of thy ramparts built anew.
Mammon and War sit now a double throne,
Yet what we dream, a wiser Age shall do.

V

Be ye lift up, O everlasting gates
Of that far City men shall build for Man!
 O fairer Day that waits,
The splendor of whose dawn we shall not see,
When selfish bonds of family and clan
Melt in the higher love that yet shall be!
O State without a master or a slave,
 Whose law of light we crave
Ere morning widen on a world set free!
 Alas! how distant are,
 To watchers of the Past,
Thy palms of peace, thy mercy and thy truth!
Yet Faith's great eyes look upward to her star,
 Strong in immortal youth:
We know the reign of Night shall end at last,
And all the ancient evil lie undone.
 O armies of the sun,
Your war is on the darkness and its tears!
 Across the gulf of years
We hear your song and see your banners shine.

Know that we too would share your toils divine,
On self and madness hastening their end.

Lo! from our Age we send
A music brief and broken and august

To mingle with your own,—

A strain from silence flown,

Saying we too have hungered to the sky,
And built from many tears and humble dust
A Dream that shall not altogether die—

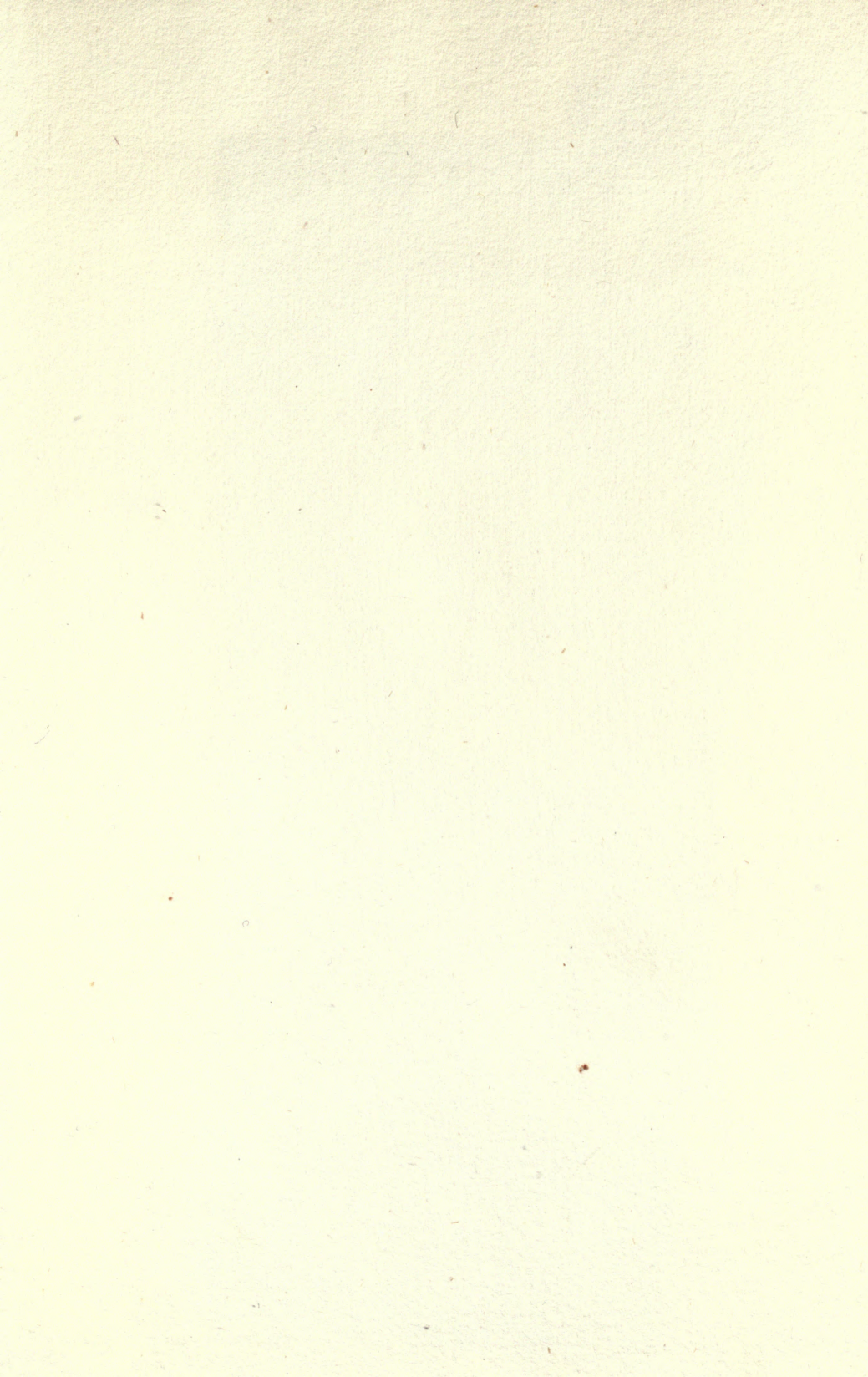
The vision of that day

When human strength shall serve the common good,
And man, forever loyal to the race,
Find, far beyond our seasons of dismay,

The guerdon of its grace:

One hope, one home, one song, one brotherhood,
And in each face the best-beloved's face.

The End



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